Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SOC

No 73 Sept. 2004

A Reserve comes of age - Baron's Haugh at 21

(Jimmy Maxwell)

The view across the Haugh to the high-flats of Motherwell.

This article is to mark the coming of age of the RSPB Reserve of Baron's Haugh at Motherwell. It will feature accounts by those officials most associated with it over the years and fall into two parts – one to cover the initial beginnings and the second to follow its development to the popular birding venue it has now become. JM (Ed.)

Part One: The Start – John Hunt
(then RSPB Scottish Reserves Officer)

One day in late 1979 I was contacted by Jimmy Maxwell and David Donnelly of the RSPB Hamilton Members' Group who suggested that I should look at an area on the edge of Motherwell for consideration as a possible RSPB nature reserve. It was called Barons Haugh and was a popular birding spot for local members by the River Clyde. They duly showed me round and I was impressed by the interesting and attractive mixture of marsh, open water, parkland and woodland.

The wetland area or "haugh" was one of the last surviving such areas of wet meadow along the River Clyde and had obvious potential for expansion and improvement. There was all year round bird interest and the proximity of Motherwell raised exciting possibilities for community and educational use. The site was over 100 ha, all under one ownership and clearly had reserve potential. Though there was no immediate prospect of being able to acquire the area, it went down on the "shopping list" for future reference.

Two years later in 1982 Barons Haugh did come on the market at an asking price of £150,000. The seller was an organisation called Car Spares Discounts which had apparently bought the area with housing development in mind but had then run into financial difficulties. Protracted negotiations ensued with the price gradually coming down over a period of months until a more reasonable figure of £60,000 was agreed.

(H Bulbie)

John Hunt on an official visit at the time

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

A visit by Frank Hamilton and Ian Prestt, Director of the RSPB, also helped to convince the Society that this would be a good acquisition. Ian was very keen on Sparrowhawks and a super view of one during his visit did no harm either! The purchase was eventually finalised in May 1983 with the Countryside Commission for Scotland kindly contributing £15,000 and WWF a further £5,000.

The first Contract Warden of the new Reserve, Alastair Moralee, faced a huge task getting to know the site and the local community while bringing under control some of the less desirable human activities.

1st Year Contract Warden - Alastair Moralee

(now RSPB Senior Site Manager – N. Wales)

Back in March1983, the phone call came - "You'll not be going to Balranald after all – we have this new reserve called Baron's Haugh……..". A month or so later, I was standing in a completely empty high-rise flat with a very non-plussed reserve manager who was telling me he was sure he had been told it was furnished….. its wonderful how much equipment you can buy in Woolworths on a Saturday afternoon when needs must… !

And that was the start to an amazing year. To have "my own" reserve was a dream, to start off a brand new site was something very special. I will always remember my first walk around the site on a Saturday afternoon, happily strolling around the woodland with the Clyde gently flowing below me and then frightened witless at blood-curdling screams coming from the other side of the woodland. It was only later that I worked out that Rangers had just scored against Motherwell !

(Jimmy Maxwell)

The first hide - placed above the water

I have so many memories; the fence posts that went missing the night after we'd built the fence , leaving just the wire, sagging pitifully; the evenings I spent operating a hy-mac very inexpertly (no training, no h assessment!) because the driver kindly agreed to leave the keys at the end of each day so that I could "have a go"; the first Whoopers actually landing on the Haugh; Kingfishers breeding on the river bank overhung with these great sweeping limes - and many, many more.

There were problems at Baron's Haugh – and I'd be dishonest if I said I didn't sometimes wonder what on earth I'd landed myself in, but I have two over-riding memories of my time there. One is of the enthusiasm of so many local helpers and the delight they all felt in having their own reserve and the second is the richness and calm of the place – so close to hustle and bustle and hardship and all the more wonderful for that. Happy 21st Baron's Haugh.

(C. McLellan)

Our 'volunteers' photo shows Alastair (bonnet) and myself with David Donnelly to the right. Going left, Ian English (now Isle of May Recorder) and a young Vicky McLellan. From John Watson (back left) the company just grows younger towards his sons at the front!

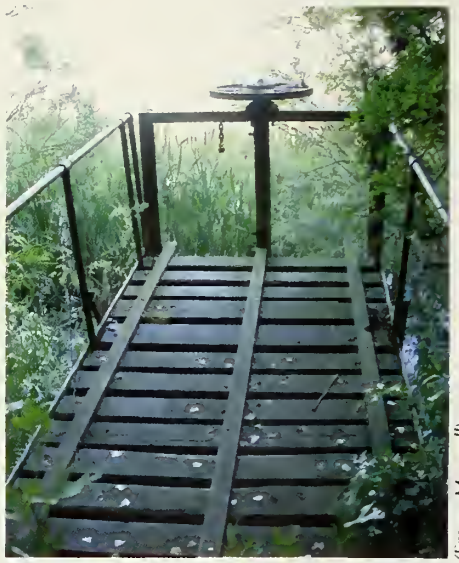
Now on to the next Contract Warden in 1984, still operating from the high-rise flat. We begin to hear about the sluice – the key to vital water levels at the Haugh, and more about those volunteers… JM

2nd Year Contract Warden – Tony Baker

(now Site Manager – Marshside RSPB Reserve)

I took on the Reserve at a sensitive time for both the Reserve and my own development. We were both still relatively new to the conservation world. Baron's Haugh has now done very well despite some ups and downs along the way. So I feel our development over the last 20 years has been along much the same lines!

It was all quite a struggle back then. We managed the Reserve from the eleventh floor of Shield's Tower, a tower block overlooking the Clyde. Taking the wheelbarrow loaded with spades and fencing gear up in the lift is one of the more surreal memories of the time. I don't know what the other inhabitants thought of all this but they all looked like they had seen stranger things in their time! Down on the Haugh, battles were fought with the fire-raising youth of the area and many character-forming adventures took place. I designed the first sluice to regulate the Haugh whilst I was there – I wonder if it still



(Jimmy Maxwell)

The sluice platform.

functions? I have a note in my notebook which says "spent £100 on bits today – JH will not be pleased". JH was John Hunt, the RSPB's Scottish Reserves Manager and £100 was an outrageous amount for a Contract Warden to spend in a day at that time! All communication with RSPB was via a frequently vandalized red phone box, whilst transport was not even on the agenda. Fortunately there were willing volunteers to help with practical tasks, lifts to the surrounding countryside and just good friendship – Vicky, Jimmy, Joe, Barbara, Donald and Ian - I remember your names with fondness - I wonder if we would recognise each other now?

The birds were always good and the range of habitat always ensured a good list. Its interesting to reflect on the Little Egret which I found in late May. A very exciting bird to find anywhere at the time, especially that far north, and in those days you still had to submit a description to the national rarities committee. Now Little Egrets are an established British breeding bird and I gather that the Resreve has gone on to 'greater egrets' this year!

(Bobby Smith)

Little Egret.

Congratulations Baron's Haugh on your 21st and I will try and get to see you soon for old time's sake. ***(Continued on P6)***

Scottish Bird News
No 73 September 2004

Edited by
Jimmy Maxwell
Ian Francis
Assisted by
Martin Collinson
Bill Gardner

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 24th October 2004 to:

SBN Editor, SOC,
Harbour Point,
Newhailes Road,
Musselburgh EH21 6SJ

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

Editor's note

Shortly before *SBN* 72 went to press, one of our editors, Brian Cartwright, was unexpectedly taken ill. It has meant that Brian has had to relinquish his position as co-editor for the foreseeable future; however, he does intend to return once his recovery is complete. He promises to maintain his interest in *SBN* especially, as well as all matters connected with SOC. For the moment, we'll miss Brian's enthusiasm and unflappable hard work – our best wishes go to him for a full recovery.

Caroline Scott

Caroline Scott joined SOC as our Admin Officer in March 2002, just at the point we left Regent Terrace and moved into our temporary offices at Musselburgh. She has now left SOC to pursue her interests in Scottish Music and has taken up a new job in central Edinburgh. The SOC administration was greatly improved under her stewardship and she helped introduce and consolidate many new office systems, as well as carrying out all the calendar driven tasks that the job entailed. She coordinated the production of much of the Club's publications in the two and half years she was with us and also wrote several excellent articles for *SBN* which were much appreciated by all those who read them.

She will be greatly missed by all the staff and volunteers at HQ and by those members who dealt with her on the phone and via email.

SOC Council and the Development Manager wish to record their thanks for all the good work that Caroline carried out with SOC.

We wish her well in her new job and hope to see her at the opening of the new Waterston House HQ next summer.

Bill Gardner - SOC Development Manager

Kate Walshaw: New Admin Officer

Kate Walshaw joins the HQ staff on the first of September and comes to us from Elsevier Ltd, a large Medical publisher. Kate has an honours degree in Geography from Edinburgh University and is a keen birder who helped with the Winter Atlas survey when she lived in Aberdeen. She brings with her also several years experience working on digital mapping and colour desktop publishing for Bartholomews and Harper Collins. She helped set up the Publishing Technology Unit within Elsevier and her DTP and Web skills will be very useful in the new Headquarters building. Jill and I look forward to working with Kate. She is a keen hillwalker and has trekked in Nepal and New Zealand.

Bill Gardner - SOC Development Manager

Kate with Keith Macgregor on the Aberlady site (Bill Gardner)

200 CLUB

MAY - 1st Prize of £30, Mrs. V. McLellan; 2nd Prize of £20, Mrs. E.M. Smith & 3rd Prize of £10, Mr. B.S. Smith.

JUNE - 1st Prize of £30, Mr. R.G. Caldow; 2nd Prize of £20, Mr. A.C. Bastable & 3rd Prize of £10, Mr. W. McKechnie.

JULY - 1st Prize of £30, Mr. B. Gardner; 2nd Prize of £20, Mr. L.H. Campbell & 3rd Prize of £10, Mr. A.J. Sprott.

New Members are always welcome. Please contact: Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, at Rosebank, Grattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire, TD6 9NH.

Protection for Scottish Birds

The Nature Conservancy (Scotland) Bill completed its passage through the Scottish Parliament in early May 2004. The Bill received Royal Assent in June and will be brought into force by the Scottish Executive over the autumn/winter. The new legislation introduces new duties in relation to biodiversity, reforms the SSSI system and strengthens the laws against wildlife crime.

A number of new provisions were introduced during the Bill's parliamentary considerations, some adding to the protection of birds. In particular, the Executive added two new schedules of species – one, whose nests/nest sites are protected throughout the year, and a second, where intentional or reckless harassment (at any time of year) is an offence. At present, only White-tailed Eagle is included on these two schedules – however, the Executive has announced it will consult, later in the year, on what other species to add to these schedules. This consultation will provide the SOC, and its members with an opportunity to make the case for adding these extra forms of protection to other species of concern.

Another major issue generating considerable debate in the Parliament was the proposal by Alex Neil MSP, on behalf of the Scottish Homing Union, to allow for licensed control of Sparrowhawks for the purpose of protecting racing pigeons. This was roundly defeated after the Minister pointed out that, were there to be evidence of significant damage, licenses could already be issued but, at present, there was no evidence of significant damage. Moreover, the other legal requirement, in advance of any license, that alternatives be fully explored, had not been met.

Overall, the new Bill, soon to be an Act, represents a major advance for nature conservation in Scotland, introducing updated, modernised and strengthened laws for the protection and management of our natural heritage.

Thanks are due to all our members who took the trouble to write to their MSPs, voicing their concerns regarding Sparrowhawk control.

Lloyd Austin, RSPB Scotland

Back copies of *'Scottish Birds'*

Russell Leavett, whom many will remember as RSPB Warden at Insh Marshes, writes from Essex to offer readers, free of charge, back copies of *Scottish Birds* for the years 1970 – 1982. He only requires them to cover his postal costs. To follow up this kind offer, contact at 24,Orchard Close, Great Oakley, Harwich, Essex CO12 5AX

Back copies of *'British Birds'*

Also free to readers are bound volumes of *British Birds* for the years 1984 – 99 and single copies till 2003. Contact - John Watson at 4, Douglas Tower, Regent's Gate, Bothwell.

Argyll Bird Club Autumn Conference

The Autumn Meeting of Argyll Bird Club will be held on Saturday 6 November 2004, at the Cairnbaan Hotel near Lochgilphead. Doors open at 9a.m. for coffee before talks, which run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. with a generous lunch break. The programme includes Helen Doherty (Capercaillie conservation), Dave Okill (Shetland rain geese), Dan Chamberlain (garden birds), Simon Lawrence (wind farm impacts) and Bob Furness (Gannet and Skua migrations) as well as news on recent bird sightings, and field trip plans. Lunch is available in the hotel lounge. We would be delighted to welcome SOC members to this meeting and provide suggestions for local birdwatching. Further details from Bob Furness (r.furness@bio.gla.ac.uk or 01301 702603 in evenings).

Corrections

Some errors occurred in the reporting of Patrick Stirling-Aird's talk (March Conference) in *SBN* 72. Firstly, it was the UK Raptor Working Group which was formed in 1995 and not the Raptor Conservation Group as stated. Also the statistic that UK Golden Eagle numbers are up by 90% is incorrect – this mistake apparently arising from confusion with other raptor figures. We appreciate that accurate data concerning raptor conservation is very important to field-workers and readers alike and apologise for these reporting slips.

A typing error appeared in *Raptor Round Up 2002* – on page 14, in the table for Osprey, Fife region should read Central – again our apologies.

New Fife Bird Recorder

Davy Ogilvie has resigned as county bird recorder for Fife. The compilers of the Fife bird report and members of FLRC, together with representatives from SOC Fife Branch and Fife Bird Club committees, are pleased to announce that Rab Shand has agreed to be the new county recorder with immediate effect. We would like to thank Davy for all his work over the last 2 years and wish Rab the very best of luck!

Rab's contact details are as follows: address 33 Liddle Drive, Bo'Ness, West Lothian EH51 0PA; telephone 01506 825101 (home) 07799532954 (mobile); email rabshand@blueyonder.co.uk

BOURC appointment

The British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee has appointed Dr. Stephen Votier (University of Glasgow) as an Ordinary Member of the Committee to replace retiring member Dr. Roger Wilkinson (Chester Zoo), who will now remain to serve as the Committee's captive bird and zoo consultant.

Request for Information

Only one Rose-breasted Grosbeak has been recorded in Scotland, a bird found in a clearly weak condition at Newton on South Uist on 7 October 1983. It was taken into care and died overnight. The editors of the forthcoming *'Birds of Scotland'* book, together with the species author, would be grateful for any information concerning the whereabouts of the specimen. It is also understood that the bird was photographed and it is hoped that a photograph can be made available for publication in the book. If anyone has any information about either the specimen or photographs could you please let me know.

Ron Forrester, The Gables, Eastlands Road, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 9JZ

Legacies

At various times significant donations to the SOC, either via a gift, or a legacy, have played a key role in the development of the Club, for example the original donation, which helped SOC and FIBOT create the Scottish Centre for Ornithology and Bird Protection at Regent Terrace in Edinburgh.

Some members who enjoyed their years of birdwatching with the Club have remembered SOC in their wills and each year we get one or two small legacies.

Larger charities depend on substantial legacies simply to sustain their running costs. A few more legacies in the next 10 years will help the SOC consolidate many of the plans they would like to put into action.

Such legacies are always appreciated by SOC Council as they often allow the Club to do something special, or extra. However legacies, these days, are never easily come by, as many solicitors have never heard of SOC. For the last three years we have been advertising in Charity Choice, a key publication which goes to all solicitors in Scotland. We all see the large direct mail shots for legacies which appear from larger UK based charities and unfortunately our small scale makes it difficult to compete with this.

This note is just a gentle reminder, to think about birds and SOC when you do make a will. Please remember the SOC as a possible legacy choice, if you have enjoyed the friendship and the activities organised by the army of volunteers that the Club so much depends on, across Scotland.

Your legacy can help future generations enjoy the same species and trips to places that brought some colour into your life.

If you would like further information about donations or legacies, please contact Bill Gardner MBE, SOC Development Manager on 0131 653 0653 or write to SOC HQ.

SOC

Leave a legacy that lives on ...

... and help new generations to enjoy and study Scottish birds in their native habitats

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club was formed in 1936 to help people of all ages and backgrounds appreciate Scottish birds. As a Scottish based environmental, educational charity, with over 2000 members, the SOC :

- *Coordinates the national Bird Recording Network*
- *Publishes ornithological surveys & atlases*
- *Maintains an extensive library of 8000 books*
- *Organises several conferences annually*
- *Gives over 100 public, birdlife lectures annually*

We are seeking donations and legacies that will help us create a new Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre and expand our educational activities.

For further information contact : Bill Gardner M.B.E.
The SOC, Harbour Point, Newhailes Road, Musselburgh EH21 6SJ
Telephone : 0131 653 0653 or Fax us on 0131 653 0654

E-mail: ***mail@the-soc.org.uk*** *See what we do on* ***www.the-soc.org.uk***

SC No: 009859

(Continued from P2) Little Egrets have indeed re-visited the Reserve, the latest in June 2004. Tony's work included a revision of Baron's Haugh's rich flora, which Alastair had already started.

Our third and last Contract Warden was to inherit the same fencing and sluice problems – continuing signs of local resistance from a persistent minority. JM

3rd Contract warden – Gary Pilkington

(now Reserves & Woodland manager – Devon Wildlife Trust – also leads worldwide nature tours)

My main memory of the reserve is one of physical and mental hard work, both on the Reserve and with public relations, trying hard to get more local people, many of them local steel workers, to accept the place has a nature reserve. Shooter patrols at weekends were good 'fun'- groups of blokes on the other side of the river shooting over my head on more than one occasion. One day I phoned the police because I'd seen two poachers on the Haugh potting at the ducks - they saw us and legged it back across the Clyde, knowing exactly where the shallow sections were.

(Jimmy Maxwell)

Contented cows in the parkland today.

Installing new fencing around the park area was quite a struggle, but I remember finishing it and the local farmer bringing his cows down to graze the land, for the first time in years. However, next morning (Sunday) I awoke and looked out of my 14th floor flat to see 27 cows roaming freely around the estate defecating everywhere, as only cows can do ! I phoned the farmer and went back to bed. Someone had cut the fence in several places - took ages to fix.....

One of my main tasks was to monitor the water levels. The run-off point on the Haugh had recently been blocked and a very expensive sluice system installed, with a turning wheel for raising and lowering the gate to let water out, or stop it. One morning as I walked down the lane I noticed that the level had dropped about 75% . I saw through my bins that the sluice gate was open wide so I rushed round to it to find that someone had removed the wheel after opening the gate fully. They had taken the trouble of coming down to the Reserve at night with an angle-grinder and welding kit and spent time actually cutting off the wheel and then welding the gate open - obviously someone not happy with the water management !! Despite all the 'problems', the Reserve was, and hopefully still is, a delightful place to be. A last remnant of the old flooded meadow systems right on the edge of a major town. Seeing all those wildfowl, swans and kingfishers was splendid and I'm sure I got through to many of the local people, educating and informing – hopefully contributing in a small way to the early history of the Reserve.

(Lang Stewart)

serve 'regular'

(John Hunt again) – With the huge development pressures in this part of Scotland, there is little doubt that if Baron's Haugh had not been purchased by the Society, it would by now be largely under concrete, while its wildlife and recreation potential would never have been realized. The present much happier outcome owes greatly to the interest and concern of all the local birdwatchers at that time.

*This **Part 1** has seen Baron's Haugh well and truly launched as a promising RSPB reserve with all the potential for a major national attraction. In the next Part, we will see Russell Nisbet in charge as the first permanent Warden and follow the development of the Reserve until the present day. JM*

(Bob Swann)

The sound and sight of a skein of Greylag Geese whiffling down onto a loch is an unforgettable experience. We in Scotland are lucky as there are plenty of places where we can see these evocative birds. Virtually the entire Icelandic breeding population of Greylags winters in Scotland. This population, is however, undergoing some major changes both in numbers and distribution.

Data derived from the annual autumn census organised by WWT show that the population increased from c.30,000 birds in the early 1960s to just over 100,000 in the late 1980s. This increase was attributed to the birds making use of improved agricultural land, particularly prior to departure in spring. During the 1990s, however, there was a steady decline in numbers to c.80,000 birds, although this now appears to have levelled off. This decline is likely to have been largely driven by unsustainable hunting levels in Iceland, where around 35,000 birds were being shot each autumn.

It is not only overall numbers that have changed, but also the wintering distribution. During the late 1950s, most of the population was found in the southern half of Scotland, between Dumfries & Galloway and Angus. In the 1960s 60% of the population were located in east central Scotland, but by the 1980s this had dropped to 30-40%. As the importance of east-central Scotland decreased, the numbers in north and northeast Scotland increased significantly.

This redistribution northwards has continued to the present day. Now the sites in northeast Scotland that formally gained importance during the withdrawal from east-central areas have themselves begun to support fewer birds. In contrast, the number of birds in Orkney has increased spectacularly, from c.3,000 in the early 1990s to 43,547 birds in 2003.

Using observations of birds marked in both Scotland and Iceland, it has become apparent, that small numbers of Icelandic Greylag Geese are now present in both Norway and the Faroes during the winter on a regular basis. This is presumably related to this trend towards a more northerly wintering location.

Recent studies, by the Highland Ringing Group and WWT, using these marked birds have given us much information on movements and site fidelity both within and between winters. Birds start arriving from Iceland during October and most have arrived by early November. They tend to utilise stubble fields feeding on spilt grain. They are very mobile at this stage, covering and recovering large areas as they search for suitable feeding sites. By late December they begin to turn up in traditional wintering areas, utilising winter cereals or improved pastureland, throughout lowland Scotland. At this time the birds are most sedentary, though some small groups still continue to move between sites. Birds get more mobile during March and April, with some beginning to move back north, but the majority remain in their wintering sites and depart on a direct flight back to Iceland in mid-late April. Although some individuals return faithfully year after year to the same sites, most are less faithful and make use of a wide range of sites throughout their life.

Of course Scotland is not just home to Icelandic Greylags. We have our own native birds as well. Traditionally restricted to the Western Isles and the north of the mainland, this population has also undergone recent changes in numbers and distribution. High levels of persecution meant that during the 1930s it was quoted as being in danger of extinction as a breeding species. Following protection, and more intensive management of grasslands, numbers, however, started to increase. This increase throughout the 1980s and 1990s led to birds spreading throughout much of their Outer Hebridean stronghold, colonising most Inner Hebridean islands, and moving onto the adjacent mainland. By 2003 it was estimated that numbers in north and west Scotland had probably reached 14,000 individuals in late summer.

Birds, often referred to as feral Greylags, were taken from this population and introduced into other parts of Scotland. The first releases took place in Wigtownshire in the 1930s. These were very successful leading to the establishment of a large self sustaining population. Further releases took place in the 1960s and 1970s in the Lothians, Perthshire and eastern Highlands. During the 1990s many of these introduced populations showed rapid increases in numbers as the birds spread out colonising local lochs and reservoirs. In south and central Scotland it is possible that there are now around 5,000 individuals in late summer. Precise figures are lacking as many birdwatchers tend to ignore these feral birds. I like to consider them as part of a re-established population. Watching a large flock of over 300 moulting adults at Thriepmuir Reservoir just outside Edinburgh, reminded me how similar the birds were in both behaviour and habitat to birds I had seen in late summer in lowland Iceland.

Indeed the situation in northern Scotland is now very confusing. As native and re-establish birds have spread out it is becoming almost impossible to separate the two populations. On Orkney where there has been a rapid increase to over 400 breeding pairs, it is known that these have originated from both 'native' Sutherland birds and introduced birds. Shetland has also witnessed a large increase in breeding birds with 120 pairs being estimated in 2002. Here, local birdwatchers believe this is due to spring staging Icelandic birds remaining to breed in Shetland, partly as a result of a large increase in the acreage of improved pastures adjacent to suitable breeding moors.

We have long known that bird populations are very dynamic. This is part of the fun and excitement of being a bird watcher. You are never quite sure what is going to happen next. Scotland's three (or should it now just be two) populations of Greylag Geese are certainly proving the point as their numbers and distributions dramatically change. It is going to be very interesting to see what continues to happen to them as they are affected by continuing climate and agricultural change.

The map below shows the areas of summering Greylags in Scotland. If you have seen any in other areas, I would appreciate receiving this information at the E-mail address below.

Bob Swann,
bob.swann@freeuk.com

Greylag Goose summer distribution

BIRD ARTISTS IN SCOTLAND

- Darren Woodhead

In the last rays of sunshine on a frosty afternoon in January 2002, these Wigeon at Musselburgh are starting to blend with their background. Camouflage is a recurring theme in Darren's work, he enjoys making the viewer search for his subjects, much as it happens in the field. Darren also remarked how in freezing conditions, paint dries slowly and forms strange patterns.

At Darren's flat in Musselburgh, there was no studio and none of his paintings were on the walls. Instead, his prolific output was stored in stacks of folders and I soon discovered that Darren only paints outdoors – not just in his sketchbook, but also his final works.

He was quick to explain that he always works direct from life, responding to actions and behaviour using a rapid technique that I found difficult to believe – apparently, he often sketches 'blind' while looking at birds through his telescope – putting the bare minimum of lines on paper to capture a particular feature, getting to know his subjects intimately and all the while gaining confidence. As he put it - "painting more what you are seeing than what you think you know". Darren also exploits his superb eye-to-hand coordination and ability to capture jizz by drawing caricatures – a side line that, he says, helps make ends meet! He also has to work fast to cope with the weather, although he seems happy to accept the effects of drizzle as an added bonus to watercolour textures. Definitely not one of the feather-detail school, painting for field guides from museum skins, he prefers to work with bike, telescope, A2 art paper (the largest he is able to transport easily by bike) and art box in his adopted home of East Lothian, a perfect place to paint his favorites - ducks, waders and geese.

A male Garganey on Musselburgh Scrapes from the pages of Darren's most recent sketch book (May 2004). Learning about this spectacular bird through rapid sketches, Darren captures jizz, the Shoveler-like bill and even the sooty leading edge to the inner underwing (did you know it existed ?)

Darren, immediately identifiable as a Yorkshire man from Leeds, trained in wildlife illustration at Carmarthenshire College and later the Royal College of Art in London. I was left in little doubt that he enjoyed the proximity of the wild Pembrokeshire coast and islands – a theme that continues in his work today in Scotland. He chose to spend two years on Ramsay Island - painting every day, in between helping out with the boats and other chores.

Gannets on the Bass Rock beginning to hang in the wind on a stiffening breeze, leaving the white of the paper as the white of the birds and set against a dramatic dark sky.

From his college days, Darren's inspiration came from artists such as Charles Tunnicliffe, John Busby, Eric Ennion, Lars Jonsson and Robert Hainard – and there is little doubt that their influences have all contributed to Darren's unique style that has now developed. Since 1995, he

A feeding frenzy of Black-headed Gulls on a receding tide at the Esk mouth at Musselburgh, Febuary 1999. Darren took 2 hours to get this energetic, rhythmic pattern on to paper. Spot the male Eider? (From his forthcoming book - see text)

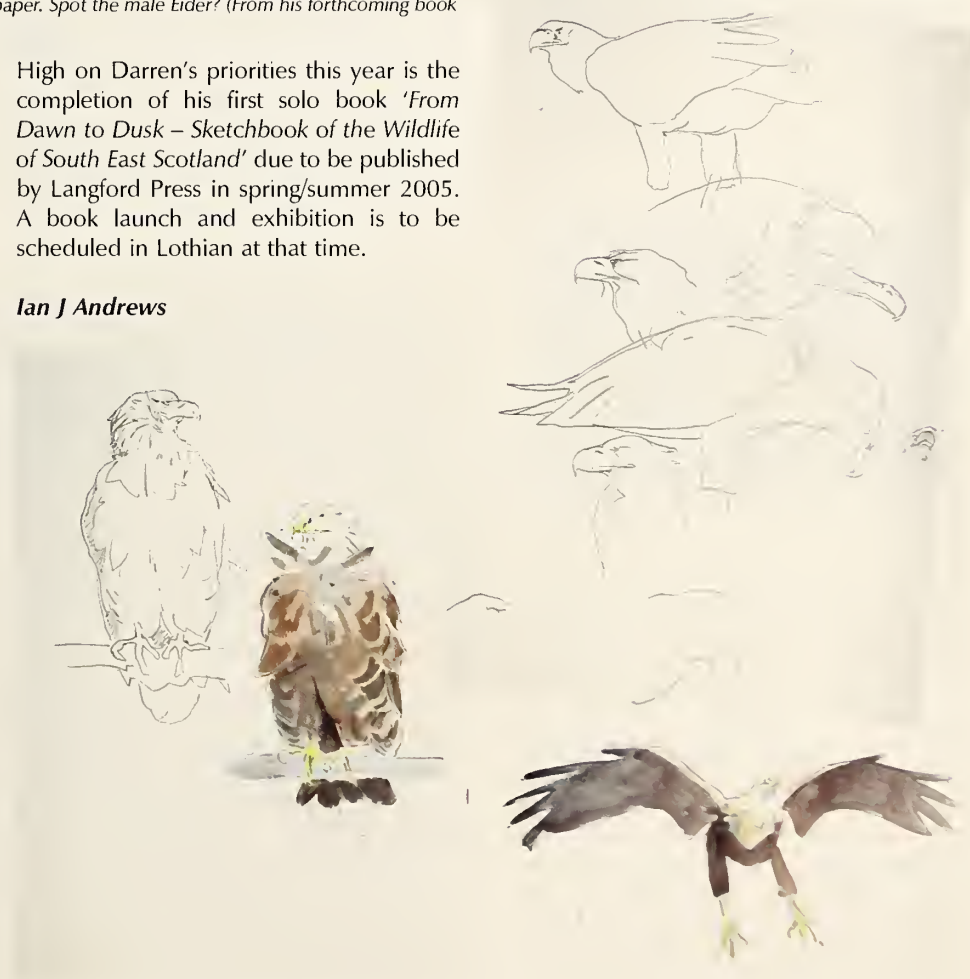
attended many of John Busby's seabird art courses in East Lothian – something he still does, although now as an assistant – and it is perhaps John's influence that strikes you most in Darren's work. Although Darren uses a pencil for rapid sketching, his final works are pure and simply water colour – "birds have colour but no outlines", so his birds reflect this - he prefers not "to create something that isn't there". So, the white paper frequently shines through and envelops his subjects.

Darren has contributed to several Society of Wildlife Artists and Artists for Nature Foundation field projects (he now sits on the Council of the SWLA), painting in the New Forest, Pyrenees, Algarve and, currently, the Great Fen in England and the 'Aig an Oir' project in the west Highlands of Scotland. Further afield on the borders area between Peru and Ecuador, he was involved with teams of international painters whose artwork there helped to draw world attention to the particular conservation problems of that area.

White-tailed Eagles drawn on the west coast of Scotland as part of the "Aig an Oir" SWLA project. The project will create a unique portrait of the Atlantic oakwoods of West Argyll, Lochaber and Skye – sites of immense value to Scotland and of international importance for conservation, which are now being restored by careful management.

High on Darren's priorities this year is the completion of his first solo book *'From Dawn to Dusk – Sketchbook of the Wildlife of South East Scotland'* due to be published by Langford Press in spring/summer 2005. A book launch and exhibition is to be scheduled in Lothian at that time.

Ian J Andrews



Mar Lodge Estate – A Cairngorm Gem

Mar Lodge and Creag Bhalg.

Situated in the southern Cairngorm mountains and at the heart of the recently designated Cairngorms National Park lies the National Trust for Scotland's (NTS) spectacular Mar Lodge Estate. Although renowned for its remnants of Caledonian pinewood the 29,380 ha estate that ranges in altitude from 350-1300m encompasses a wide range of habitat types that are host to a diverse flora and fauna. The northern part of the estate is characterised by the imposing granite massif of the Cairngorms and a large part of the high altitude Cairngorm plateau. This area supports montane habitats such as moss-heath, grassland, dwarf shrub heath and snow bed vegetation but large areas remain un-vegetated as a result of the extreme climate experienced in winter.

(Arthur Grosset)

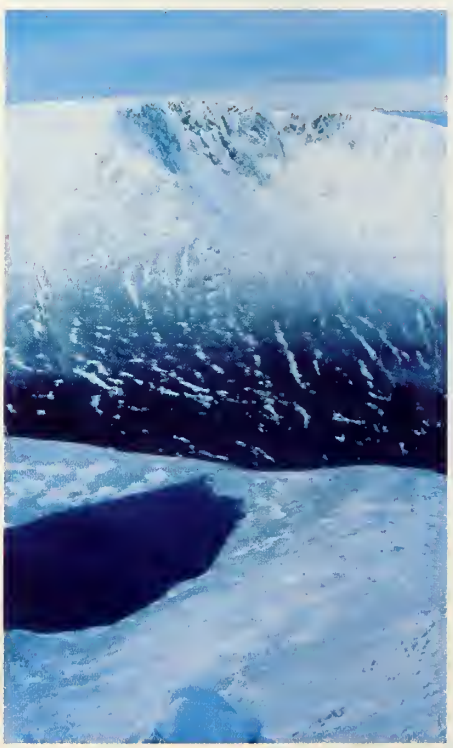
A Raven gliding.

Heather moorland cloaks the mid- to lower slopes of the hills throughout the estate. In the east, drier heath communities predominate but it becomes progressively wetter to the west and dry heath is commonly replaced with wet heath, mire and blanket bog. Mar Lodge Estate supports 836 ha of remnant native Caledonian pinewood and 14 ha of semi-natural birch woodland that is largely confined to the eastern glens of the estate. Further woodland habitat occurs in the form of plantations, the wildlife value of which is being improved through various management practices. The tangled web of streams and burns unite to form the river Dee that passes through the southern part of the estate. The grassland and wetland floodplain habitats along the river are grazed seasonally by sheep and cattle.

While for its size and scale Mar Lodge Estate does not boast a prolific number of bird species it makes up for this in its diversity. A provisional bird list includes 110 species of which 70 are known to breed on the estate. Bird species range from Golden Eagles, which can be seen over all habitats to the Goldcrests resident in conifer woodland. Winter is the quietest time for birds on the estate with only the hardiest species choosing to sit out the long and cold season. Spring sees the estate burst into life with species returning for the breeding season from their wintering habitats at the coast, in the lowlands or from further south in Europe and Africa. By September/October most summer visitors have left and the only visitors the estate receives over autumn and winter are occasional influxes of Redwings, Fieldfares and Bramblings from Scandinavia. These species strip the remaining berries from trees and bushes before moving further south west.

The high altitude montane areas are inhospitable in winter and Ptarmigan is the only species resident year round in these areas. The Cairngorms are a stronghold for Ptarmigan and these birds are joined by small numbers of Snow Buntings and Dotterels in the breeding season – species of particular conservation importance. Golden Eagles and Ravens can be observed over the high tops on the look out for food and eagles nest on steep inaccessible crags and in some trees. Suitable nest sites are available for Ravens, but to date there are no confirmed records of breeding on Mar Lodge Estate, they nest nearby.

Other species that visit the montane zone but are more commonly associated with moorland and grassland habitats at lower altitudes are Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Wheatear, Whinchat, Ring Ouzel and Stonechat. These birds are the prey of Merlins that return to the moorland, where they hunt and breed successfully. Likewise, a number of waders return to the moorland and these along with Red Grouse (which are present year round) must be wary of predators such as Golden Eagles and Peregrine Falcons that also breed on the estate. Hen Harriers do not breed, but are observed occasionally in autumn and winter and Short-eared Owls are relatively uncommon. Dunlin, Golden Plover, Snipe, Redshank and Curlew are generally found in the wetter areas of moorland and often



Braeriach in winter.

within grass heather mosaics where the food supply is more abundant. Greenshank previously bred on Mar Lodge Estate but this species which is at the edge of its distribution in Deeside has not been recorded in recent years. Oystercatchers and Lapwings also return in spring but they tend to breed in the rough grassland, river shingle and wetland habitats in the main Dee valley and along the larger tributaries such as the Lui and Quoich waters. Overall numbers of breeding waders have increased in the Quoich wetlands since NTS acquired the estate in 1995.

(Jimmy Maxwell)

(Above) Blackcock at the lek. (Below) Red Grouse.

Without doubt it is the woodland habitats that support the largest number of bird species. Management to encourage natural regeneration within the woodlands along with other practices such as leaving all dead wood should have long-term benefits for the bird populations. Commonly occurring woodland species include Chaffinch, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Robin, Wood Pigeon, Woodcock, Treecreeper and Willow Warbler. Less common species are Bullfinch, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Tree Pipit, Cuckoo, Sparrowhawk, Tawny Owl and Jay. Great-spotted and Green Woodpeckers (the latter feeding mainly on ants) are present in the woodlands but seen infrequently. Crested Tits live and breed on the other side of the Cairngorms in Speyside but although there are infrequent records on Mar Lodge Estate this species has never bred nor established a resident population here. Previously it was thought that Mar Lodge was a stronghold for the Scottish Crossbill. Although this species still breeds on the estate, recent research has revealed that Parrot Crossbills are the most common crossbill species present on the estate.

Black Grouse and Capercaillie currently have a high profile as their numbers have severely declined in the last decade and this has been attributed to climate change, fence strikes, increased predation and inappropriate snaring. Within Mar Lodge Estate, Black Grouse numbers are increasing and Capercaillies, although we have no known lek sites, appear to be stable (see note below). This year, 176 lekking Black Grouse males were recorded with the largest lek holding 32 birds. It is hoped that extensive removal of deer fences and marking of the remaining fences, thinning the edges of plantations and an increase in the area of pinewood habitat will help to secure the successful future of these charismatic species at Mar Lodge. NTS would encourage anyone trying to view woodland grouse to follow the birdwatchers' code of conduct for these species, produced by RSPB in partnership with a number of other organisations.

(Arthur Grosset)

Golden Eagle
by John Busby

The riverine and wetland habitats of the estate support a number of bird species. Almost ubiquitous throughout the waterways of the estate are Dippers, Grey Wagtails and Common Sandpipers. Dippers remain on the estate all year round whereas Common Sandpiper and Grey Wagtails are migrants. Teal, Wigeon, Goosander and Mallard are the breeding duck species occurring on the estate but none is particularly common. Whooper Swans are occasionally observed on passage and two main gull colonies, Common Gulls on the Quoich fan and Black-headed Gulls in Glen Derry, usually establish each breeding season on the estate.

Finally we have the rare and infrequent visitors to Mar Lodge Estate for which there are only one or two records. Such species include Snowy Owl (1970s), Fulmar, Great Skua, Red Kite, Starling and White-fronted Goose.

Bird records for the estate have been collected from a breeding bird survey conducted in 1998, from BTO surveys, the NE Scotland Breeding Bird Atlas and from casual sightings over a number of years. It is likely that many species, particularly the less common ones, are under-recorded and we believe there is much to discover about birds on Mar Lodge Estate. Mar Lodge is a great place to watch birds and we would be happy to receive any further bird records for the estate.

The main point of access to the estate is at Linn of Dee car park, grid ref NO063897, which has composting toilets and is adjacent to the scenic gorge. Linn of Quoich, an informal parking area at NO118912, is a good starting point for the eastern part of the estate. There is open access on foot at all times.

Shaila Rao, Mar Lodge Ecologist
Web site: www.marlodgeestate.org.uk
Rangers Office Tel: 013397 41669

As we go to press, SNH is proposing that the Cairngorms Special Protection Area designated in part for Capercaillie, should be extended to include parts of Mar Estate which adjoins Mar Lodge to the south. Eds.

International research findings show effects of marine litter on seabirds

(Bobby Smith)

A graphic demonstration of the effects of marine litter on North Sea seabirds can be found in the results of an international research project, funded by Save the North Sea. The research, which involves the studying of stomach contents of dead Fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*) from North Sea regions, found during its pilot stage that many of those birds had plastic fragments in their stomachs.

The Save the North Sea campaign is funding the research as part of their extensive activities to help combat marine litter in the North Sea and raise awareness of this extensive problem, to help change attitudes and behaviour.

Dutch researcher Dr Jan van Franeker, from the institute ALTERRA, heads the research project, working with volunteers from the Shetland Islands, Orkney Islands, North East England, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Faeroer. They use the amount of plastic and other wastes found in the stomachs of the Fulmars as a measure of the level of marine litter in the North Sea.

The international Fulmar study started through a pilot study of Dutch Fulmars, carried out by Dr Franeker that took place in the Netherlands from 1982 – 2001 and it was this study that discovered that a staggering 96% of the sample of dead Fulmars had plastic fragments in their stomachs.

Dr Jan van Franeker comments on this finding: "One of the reasons for this is that Fulmars have the unfortunate habit of eating almost anything they encounter at the surface of the sea, including marine litter such as plastics. These birds are also unique since they don't regurgitate what they have ingested, providing a very good tool for measuring the accumulation of plastic in their stomachs."

The continuing research aims, through its findings, to give strong conclusions to the state of marine litter in the North Sea and its impact on Fulmars, as well as other marine animals. The data will also supply the vast majority of information required for a scientifically sound implementation of a Fulmar-Litter-EcoQO system in the North Sea region in 2005, as demanded by North Sea governments.

Martin Heubeck is one of the coordinators in Shetland working closely with Dr Franeker on the international research. He carries out monthly checks of a sample of beaches in Shetland and during his time has discovered a huge array of marine litter.

Martin comments: "The amount of plastic granules found in Fulmar stomachs can be equated to an adult human walking around with 60 grams of plastic in their stomach the entire time. This demonstrates the extent of what the Fulmars experience on a daily basis, and whilst plastic content may not be the direct cause of death, the birds can be weakened through suppressed appetite as plastics take space or through lesions on the gut wall."

An incredible 20,000 tonnes of litter is disposed of in the North Sea every year; of that, 70% sinks to the bottom, 15% floats on the surface and 15% is washed up on our coasts. Seabirds as well as other marine animals are threatened by marine litter which they mistake for food or, in the case of discarded nets and plastics, become trapped in and die.

Find out more information on Save the North Sea by visiting their website at www.savethenorthsea.com/fulmars

Martin Heubeck
martinheubeck@btinternet.com

A beached Fulmar.

Windfarms and Birds: a further comment by David MacArthur of Scottish Power

(Ian Francis)

I would like to respond to Tim Marshall's article in *SBN 72*, but first, I would like to re-iterate my view - that wind power can help reduce the effects of global warming and that this can most definitely be achieved without detrimental effects on bird populations, through sensitive site selection. This view is also held by the RSPB and SNH. Tim's article 'a problem waiting to happen?' unfortunately states a number of misconceptions and concludes that 'wind farms are about as environmentally unfriendly as you can get!' This does not reflect the reality of the issues involved.

Wind energy reduces emissions of greenhouse gases because every unit of electricity produced replaces a unit of electricity generated by other fossil fuel power stations. On average, coal fired power stations emit around 800 – 1000 kg of carbon dioxide for every Megawatt-hour. Therefore every Megawatt-hour produced by wind energy avoids up to one tonne of carbon dioxide being emitted into the atmosphere. A typical wind farm such as Scottish Power's Cruach Mhor 35 MW Wind farm in Argyll saves on average 61,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year and provides approximately 18,333 homes with green energy every year. In addition to this, because wind farms reduce pollution from fossil fuel power stations, emissions of the main gases causing acid rain (nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide) are reduced.

With regard to the point that carbon dioxide is generated during the manufacture of the wind turbines; every power station has an 'energy balance' which is the time it takes to generate the electricity used to actually build the power station. Wind farms typically take between 3 to 5 months to pay back the energy consumed during their manufacturing and construction (Hansard, Written Answers to Questions, 4 February 2004, Jacqui Smith, Minister of State of Industry and the Regions). This compares well with nuclear power stations which typically take 6 months. Also, modern wind turbines are exceptionally quiet with noise levels comparable to a flowing stream 50-100 metres away or from leaves rustling in a gentle breeze. Research has shown that where noise is perceived as an issue when a wind farm is proposed, in reality there are no difficulties with operational wind farms being well accepted.

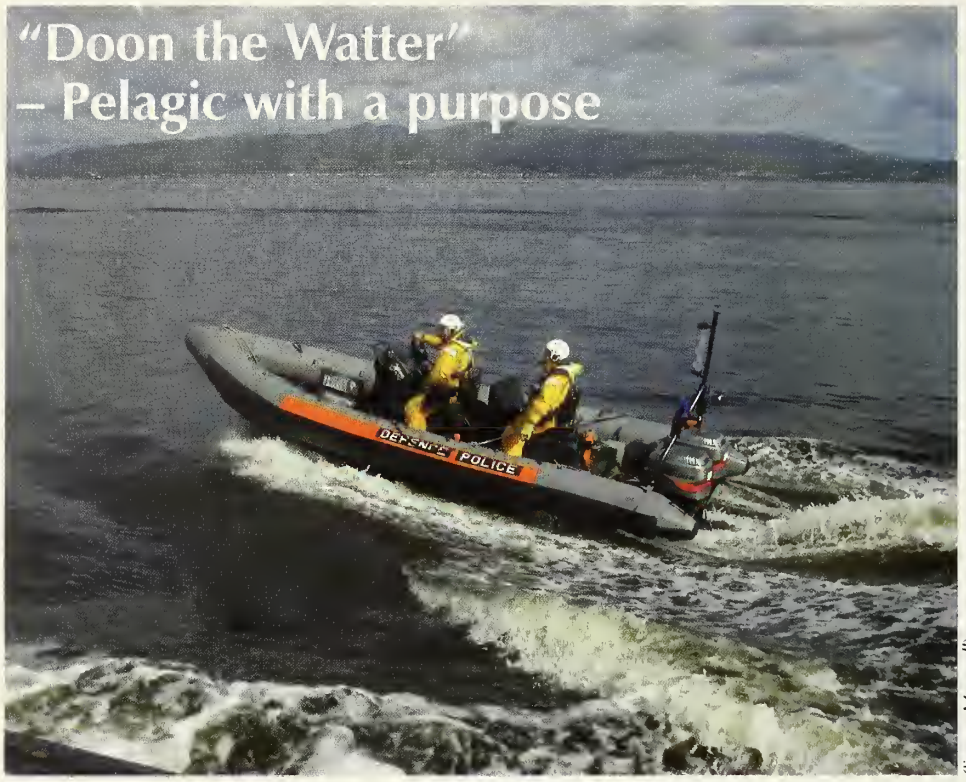
Global warming is a real threat; it is occurring now and requires immediate action. The European Environment Agency recently released a report (Impacts of Europe's changing climate – August 04) which concluded that ' If we go on as we are, we have less than 50 years before we encounter conditions which will be uncharted and potentially hazardous'. These events are already occurring as demonstrated by the recent massive sea bird breeding failures in Orkney and Shetland, where thousands of pairs of Guillemots, Great Skuas, Arctic Skuas, Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes have largely failed to raise any young at all. The reason for this catastrophe is strongly believed to be global warming. Sea temperatures in this area have risen by approximately 2 degrees Celsius over 20 years. This has caused planktonic species to move further north, resulting in a crash of the sand eel populations in this area – the main food source for many sea birds. Tony Juniper, director of Friends of the Earth has stated that "The catastrophe [of these] seabirds is just a foretaste of what lies ahead...It shows that climate change is happening now, [with] devastating consequences here in Britain, and it shows that reducing the pollution causing changes to the earth's climate should now be the global number one political priority."

In conclusion, sensitively sited wind farms that avoid damaging impacts on bird populations have a valuable contribution to make in combating the disastrous effects of global warming.

David MacArthur MIEEM,
Ecologist, Scottish Power

Editors' note: we offered each of the contributors to the wind farm feature in SBN 72 the chance to respond to the others. We would continue to welcome SOC members' views on this issue

"Doon the Watter" – Pelagic with a purpose



(Jimmy Maxwell)

Our title photo is a powerful image of Ministry of Defence Police at high speed in Greenock docks as they zoom in to escort us down the Clyde Estuary. We, a party of wildlife enthusiasts, are all on board a large, sturdy MOD working vessel to gather as much evidence as possible of the wildlife to be seen within the estuarine habitat.

As well as this, the idea was for us, and the public, to increase our awareness of the role the MOD now has within a Partnership which includes the Scottish Executive, all police forces, SNH and many non-government organisations like SWT and RSPCA. This Partnership is dedicated to fighting wildlife crime in all its various forms.

John Simpson, Wildlife Liaison Officer for the MOD police, is in charge and after a quick look round the "Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime" display unit on the quay, we are off, binoculars at the ready to enjoy the sparkling sunshine and fresh sea air. Most watchers on board are SOC members and as the first Black Guillemot and Red-throated Diver are ticked off the chat is good and many old friendships are renewed.

(Jimmy Maxwell)

The Partnership display unit

Before the estuary really opens out, several Harbour Porpoises are spotted, their black, gleaming backs and short dorsals wheeling through the surface. We were made aware that many boating enthusiasts follow these creatures and the occasional Basking Sharks, causing unnecessary harassment. Soon, the first Fulmars and Gannets appear and the occasional Sandwich Tern. Manx Shearwaters are in evidence off Toward Point and from then on they feature off and on, sometimes as a bobbing party on the surface, sometimes with that classic, effortless gliding flight that always thrills the watcher however often it is seen.

Heading down past the south end of Bute and the opening to Loch Fyne, it is nearer to Lochranza before the first skuas are sighted – a group of three Bonxies labouring purposefully northward and showing clearly against the backdrop of Arran's craggy tops. At Lochranza we have one hour to walk around, have a leisurely cuppa (or other) at the hotel or go off at the trot to search for the local Golden Eagle. Many settled for the first options but some of us pressed on and a lucky few achieved excellent sightings.

(Jimmy Maxwell)

Kenny lists the wildlife sightings

Eight Buzzards and a Peregrine floated above the Cock of Arran as we steamed back out, the occasional Kittiwake swinging over our bows. By this time, a neat system of registering species has evolved, with a centrally stationed MOD officer to receive shouted sightings coming from all sides. Only one other skua turned up, a dark-phase Arctic, but Common Guillemots (at this time flightless due to moult) were regular and continued right back to Greenock. Some were lucky to spot a Storm Petrel dancing above the wave tops - others picked up a Kestrel heading who knows where !

(Jimmy Maxwell)

Information and Freebees

On the trip, £1000 was donated to WWF Scotland and, although admittedly we all would be classed as "the converted", I think everyone felt that the Partnership message was getting through - the public needs to be more aware that our creatures are being blatantly stolen from the wild, whether Fresh-water Mussels or Ospreys' eggs, and also that frequent crimes such as Hen Harrier predation are still happening. It was comforting to realise that the MOD is now becoming a powerful voice in this arena.

Jimmy Maxwell

Further trips like this will be organised and will be open to all SOC members on a first-come-first-served basis. Ed.

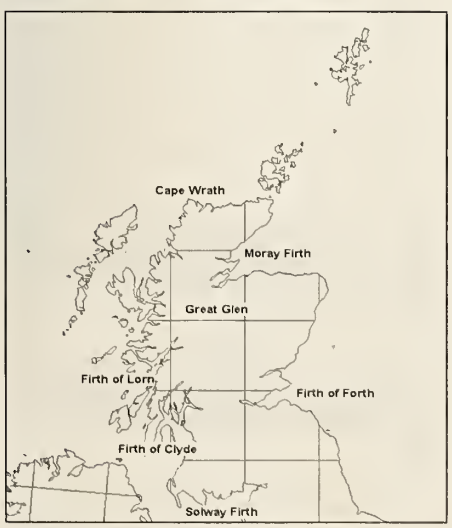
(Lang Stewart)

From left, MOD personnel Katie Harper, John Simpson and (far right) Kenny Stewart checks arrangements with Mike Donaghy of WWF Scotland

(Ian Francis)

Overland migration of Kittiwakes in Lynn of Lorne

The unusual behaviour of a group of 60-plus Kittiwakes Rissa tridactyla, off the coast of Lismore in March 2003, brought to mind a similar observation of mine involving this pelagic gull, at the same location, some 12 years before.



Kittiwake overland migration areas mentioned in the text

Bright sunshine and calm water saw a flock of 66 Kittiwakes resting offshore between Ganavan bay, near Oban and the south-eastern shore of Lismore on 18th March last year. Suddenly, the majority of this group (49 birds) took to the air and proceeded to head, purposefully, in a northerly direction. About 20 birds broke rank from the rest of this flock and, as they gained elevation, were seen to form something akin to a 'tight ball', until the birds were lost from sight over the Lynn of Lorne, away to the north-east.

Having experienced the mass movement of thousands of Kittiwakes, travelling into a sidewind, north-east up the Lynn of Lorne during squally sleet and snow showers on 16 March 1991, I had little doubt that I was witnessing the advent of overland migration in action. Migrant Kittiwakes, having over-wintered far out in the North Atlantic, were on the move up the Firth of Lorne, extending into Loch Linnhe, via the Lynn of Lorne and the Appin coast. With a large percentage of Scottish breeding Kittiwakes being found along the north and north-east coasts, it is easy to speculate that by travelling onward towards Fort William, these high flying migrants would access the Great Glen, which would then provide an invaluable visual route to their intended destination.

The wintry conditions back in1991 prevented birds from gaining altitude prior to setting off inland along the Great Glen; instead, thousands of birds filed past, low to the icy waves, until conditions sufficiently improved for them to climb higher. Overland migration is nothing new among seabirds with skuas suspected of utilising the Forth-Clyde 'flyway', as well as a Firth of Forth - Solway Firth land-bridge to link the North Sea with the Irish Sea and North Atlantic. Occasionally, Gannets may be found far inland during their spring journeys, and Kittiwakes have been found far up the Clyde estuary, gaining height as they headed east (towards the Forth) over the Erskine bridge. Such sightings represent only the tip of the iceberg, however, as most birds perform such overland migrations thousands of feet up, far out of sight of the birdwatcher's gaze.

Kittiwakes, hoping to short-cut the coastal journey around Cape Wrath to the north, could commence their overland travels anywhere from Port Appin northwards, ensuring continued and uninterrupted views of their route-finder, the Great Glen. My observations, based 12 years apart, suggest that Kittiwakes undertake this overland migration each spring during March, and future observations of Kittiwakes in the coastal waters of North Argyll at this time may provide further insight into this phenomenon.

Stuart Gibson

NOTES & COMMENT

Update on Little Ringed Plovers

With reference to the article in *SBN* 71 where I described how the attempted breeding in Lanarkshire ended in failure, I am happy to report that the Little Ringed Plovers returned faithfully to exactly the same site this year and raised two chicks.

Jimmy Maxwell

Leucistic Lapwing

Recalling John Bowler's sighting of a leucistic Lapwing on Tiree (*SBN* 70), I was interested to find two similar birds at Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve, Motherwell, in August 2004. These Lapwings do not seem to be as white as the Tiree bird, but like it, appear to have retained some of the dark purple/green in the outer wing. The mantle and coverts are of a light mushroom shade with white fringes. The tail is still dark and the breast-band a paler version of the normal Lapwing we see in the photograph.

(Lang Stewart)

The Baron's Haugh Lapwings.

They are currently part of a flock of some 1200 Lapwings which frequently fly up in a panic to the attentions of the local Sparrowhawks, taking our visiting Ruffs with them.

Lang Stewart

Nuthatch Ringing

With reference to Rab Smith's query (*SBN* 72) as to whether he was first to ring nest-box Nuthatch young in Scotland, I'm afraid his aren't the first. I believe these were a brood of 6 ringed in a nestbox at the Hirsel, Coldstream by John Strowger in 1989. The second was probably a brood of 2 ringed in a box at Crailing Hall, Jedburgh, by Bobby Bell.

(Rab Smith)

Food for the nestlings.

Tom Dougall

We are also informed that Nuthatches bred in Ayrshire this year for the first time. Eds.

Nuthatches and Red-winged Blackbirds

In the second of his articles on the recent spread of the Nuthatch in Scotland (*SBN* 72: 9), Jimmy Maxwell mentions a failed introduction at Inveraray in the nineteenth century. This attempt is briefly described by Harvie-Brown and Buckley in their 1892 book, A Vertebrate Fauna of Argyll and the Inner Hebrides

The information in the book comes from a letter written to Harvie-Brown on 5th February 1889 by George Douglas Campbell, the eighth Duke of Argyll. The bulk of this letter (which forms part of the Harvie-Brown collection held at the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh) is concerned with another introduction attempt, also referred to in Harvie-Brown and Buckley's book. It makes interesting reading:

"The story about my Starlings [Red-winged Blackbirds, *Agelaius phoeniceus*] is very simple. Having seen the bird in America and having had accounts of its habits, it struck me that if any American bird could be introduced into Europe and established here, this would probably be a species likely to thrive. It is very pretty and very hardy in the New World. Accordingly I asked a friend in New York to send me a small consignment of the Red-shouldered Starling alive. He did so three years ago. The birds arrived in good condition in October; but I thought it would be better to keep them till Spring before turning them out – as migratory instincts might interfere if they were let out late in Autumn.

They throve quite well all through the Winter, only two or three having bred. In May about seven couple [sic] were turned out. They were seen about the place for a few weeks and then disappeared. One or two were recorded as having been seen and shot in different parts of Scotland. My keepers think they saw a small party next Autumn, and one or two were recorded that Autumn as having been seen at one of the lighthouses in the South of Ireland – as if they were trying to migrate across the ocean.

None have ever been seen since in this neighbourhood. As there is here a good swampy meadowland, with bushes, in one of the glens, I thought they might have found a habitat such as, I believe, they principally affect in America.

The attempt to acclimatise or naturalise this species has, so far, been a complete failure. But as all new birds are speedily shot, or at least fired at, in this country, the failure is hardly surprising. I had hoped, too, that they might have consorted with the Common Starling and thus escaped notice. But the types are too distinct for this.

I may mention that I have failed also in, perhaps, a more likely attempt which was to introduce into the large woods of this place the Common English Nuthatch. I got from a Dealer in birds at Brighton a good many couple of these birds and turned them out in most suitable tracts of old timber. Not one of them was ever seen again."

This is just one of several letters sent to Harvie-Brown by the Duke of Argyll in the late 1880s and early 1890s. In the others can be found details of unusual birds that appeared at Inveraray, including Roller and Snowy Owl, as well as various other observations that Harvie-Brown and Buckley subsequently incorporated in their book.

Tristan ap Rheinallt

"Aye - they call it digiscoping!"

(Keith Macgregor)

Goldcrest Behaviour

While on a visit on June 14th 2004 to a house in Rosemount, Blairgowrie, my attention was drawn to the extraordinary behaviour of an adult Goldcrest. It was jumping up and down repeatedly outside a window with the apparent object of looking at its reflection, which it may have regarded as an aggressor - I can think of no other reason. In order to do so, each jump had to be about 15 cm and I estimated that it reached about 90 times a minute and kept it up for as long as I watched it on two occasions for about 15 minutes, with occasional short breaks to indulge in what appeared to be displacement behaviour in a nearby tree. The window ledge was soiled with its droppings for its whole length. The owner of the house told me that the bird had been acting in this strange way for several days prior to my arrival and had done so the previous year about the same time. It ceased its surely exhausting and unrewarding activity soon after I left.

Peter Cunningham

Wilson's Phalarope in Europe

Imagine a new bird for Europe being found near Edinburgh – how many birders do you think would turn up in the first few days? One, two or three thousand, who knows. Away back in 1954 there were probably about 20! The bird was a Wilson's Phalarope which we found on the 11th September in Fife between North Queensferry and Rosyth on an area of reclaimed mudflats. In the '50s these mudflats held Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, Ruff, Pintail and many duck, but now when you drive north on the M90 all you see is reedbeds.

In true fashion we took detailed notes as we had never seen a wader like this before. We phoned George Waterston and he had no idea either. The following day, George and Irene, Dougal Andrew and the pair of us got the first ferry across to North Queensferry. On arriving, Dougal immediately named the species as he had just got a copy of the newly published *Birds of Eastern America*. The bird showed itself perfectly, not only to us but to another five bird-watchers, including Miss Evelyn Baxter (of Baxter and Rintoul fame).

It stayed until 5th October and was probably seen by about 50 people. No decent photographs were taken though George organised a Navy photographer and put him into a hide by the pool the bird had frequented. We had been delighted to see the bird right in front of the hide and when it left the area, George asked him how many pictures he had taken. "None" was the answer as he had not even seen the bird! Since the '50s the species has been seen many times in the UK, including Aberlady. The Fife Bird Club even produced a T-shirt with a Wilson's Phalarope and the legend printed on it some three years ago.

Frank Hamilton & Keith Macgregor

Update on the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group

The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group (SRMG) was formed in June 2002 and consists of representatives from SNH (who chair the meetings), RSPB Scotland, BTO Scotland, JNCC, Scottish Raptor Study Groups, Rare Breeding Bird Panel and SOC. I am the SOC's representative and although I have been unable to attend all the meetings, I always receive and comment on papers issued by and to the group. This note provides an update on the activities of the SRMG in its first two years of existence.

SNH requires access to raptor data to discharge a number of its statutory functions. The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme was launched in June 2002 (*SBN* 65:5) to build on the work done by the Scottish Raptor Study Groups and other organisations and individuals who have had a long-term involvement with the monitoring and conservation of birds of prey in Scotland. The scheme, overseen by the SRMG, covers diurnal birds of prey, owls and Common Ravens. The three objectives of the scheme are to:

1 Provide information on Scottish raptor populations, in order to determine trends in numbers, range, survival and productivity; and to understand the causes of population change.
2 Promote better cooperation between the various bodies responsible for gathering information on Scottish Raptors.

3 Maintain high and uniform standards for the collection, collation, auditing and analysis of data and reporting of information.

Since its inception, there have been a number of significant achievements. The SRMG recruited a Scottish Raptor Monitoring Officer (Brian Etheridge) whose key work includes liaison with raptor workers and the collation and management of raptor data. The post is part-time and wholly funded by SNH. A system for the collection and collation of raptor data from Scottish Raptor Study Group workers has been established, which provides standard mechanisms for recording of this data. All data for 2003 has been collated – over 3000 returns were made covering 19 species. Included in this is a summary of the numbers of nests of each raptor species located and information on the outcome of breeding attempts.

Similar, but more limited, data have been summarised previously in the SOC publication Raptor Round Up. The first annual report of the SRMG (covering 2003) is in preparation and will supercede Raptor Round Up. Proposals for assessing the representativeness of current raptor monitoring in Scotland have been developed alongside the uses of raptor data to determine trends and changes in Scottish raptor populations and the factors responsible for these. It is intended that the new report will be a comprehensive and accessible summary of the trends in Scottish raptor populations.

On the publicity front the SRMG has contributed to positive publicity for the national surveys of Peregrine Falcon in 2002, Golden Eagle in 2003 and Hen Harrier this year. Much of this has included early dissemination of the results in the national media.

The Hen Harrier survey this year includes a request for data on Short-eared Owls, and SOC members have been asked to report all their observations to assist with this survey (see last *SBN*). Preliminary indications are that there are few in Argyll and south Scotland but good numbers in northern Scotland, Tayside and the Hebrides. For Hen Harrier, there seem to be good number of breeding birds on the Uists and Orkney (at least 82 pairs on these islands), but low numbers on the mainland with only a few areas holding better numbers.

The Survey and Monitoring Manual for Raptors will be published as a book in autumn 2004 and will describe survey methods for all raptors which breed regularly in Scotland. The text is based on the consolidated experience of the Scottish Raptor Study Groups and others with expertise in field studies of raptors.

Priorities for future work include the publication of this manual, and the establishment of an inventory of current survey coverage to allow identification of areas or species which would benefit from additional surveillance. This may provide opportunities for SOC members to participate in raptor monitoring, especially of commoner species such as Sparrowhawk and owls. Also, there will be more detailed analysis and reporting of trends and changes in raptor populations. Research is being developed to identify constraints initially in four species: Hen Harrier, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon and Common Buzzard. These analyses will be based on pioneering work on Golden Eagle, which identified persecution as a key constraining factor on the Scottish population. Techniques include population and range modeling, GIS and statistical analysis. Armed with this information, adverse changes can be addressed through conservation and management actions, and, crucially, this framework approach allows early detection of conservation problems. For example, it has been identified that an apparently stable Scottish Golden Eagle population is actually very vulnerable to decline because of the high mortality of sub-adult eagles. Young birds which have not yet established breeding territories are being drawn into areas of apparently suitable habitat where there is a high incidence of illegal persecution, in particular through poisoned bait. I am a member of the sub-committee responsible for progressing this work and have a particular interest in Common Buzzard data analysis.

Being part of this new group has been a stimulating experience for me. As an amateur mixing with other amateur and professional raptor experts I feel able to enhance my knowledge of the Scottish raptor scene and ensure that the SOC is seen as a prominent partner in the development of raptor conservation and science. I hope to be able to provide more feedback in the future through the pages of *SBN*.

Mark Holling

Hen Harriers at Muirshiel

On a pouring wet Saturday afternoon in June, I visited the Hen Harrier Viewing Project at Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park near Loch Winnoch. CCTV pictures showed us continuous live coverage of a Harrier's nest – the female sitting disconsolately on her lately-hatched brood. Despite the awful weather, it was a most enjoyable visit – the welcome extended to visitors was warm and friendly and we talked Harriers with the knowledgeable staff members while catching up on last year's footage showing the male bird's visits, food passes and the young being fed.

All this insight into Hen Harrier was enhanced by a superb poem on the wall, written by Betty McKellar who stays on a local farm. I think the broad Scots language really catches the essence of this exciting species and I have printed it out here for you to enjoy. Also displayed was this translation for visitors, which I thought was equally poetic and apt. Betty has several books of poetry published – of special interest for us the one entitled *Poetry Trails* which features other birds and the Loch Winnoch area. It is available at the centre, the proceeds going to charity. All in all, an interesting visit to this lovely upland location and I was pleased to see our own SOC involved in such an excellent project – another sign of the growing cooperation between the leading conservation agencies.

Jimmy Maxwell

We are indebted to Betty for allowing us to print this as yet unpublished poem. Eds.

(Jimmy Maxwell)

Live nestsite viewing and a good chat.

***White-Aboon-Gled* (Hen Harrier)**

Harrier flicht, the flee-past –
A brag o white agin blae lift
A swoop of licht doon til the grey of the bruntland
A vaunting o wing
For him, nae hidin;
His air daunce is a soaring
A sclim
A gled-tummlin-joy tae music frae the waftin o the win'
The pairing.

"Gae-back gae-back gae-back"
Frichts
Echo aff the butts
In swithers o soond
Frae the scutterin grouse
But he'll bide
The bullet o siller flame
Lord o the game.

In her heathery bield
His mate
settles
Cooried on the future
A' yallow-glitter-watchfu'ness wanease
Een no seen
Are kittling
Up her hause-bane.

By Betty McKellar

(*blae lift*; blue sky, *swithers*; panics, *kittlin*; tickling, *gled*; hawk, *bield*; shelter, *wanease*; unease, *hause bane*; neck bone)

Harrier

It was a fly-past
A display
The air ace of the moor
Appeared
On cue
No camouflage
He flew
Majestically
A pride of white
Against the height of rock and sky
A swoop of light
Towards the heathland grey
The harrier flight.

"Go back go back go back" –
Frights of sound
Resonate
Panics echo in staccato
From the scuttering grouse.

But he will stay.
In this wide Muirshiel world
He is the Lord
Of all that he surveys.

And in her hidden place
His mate
Settles
On the future
All yellow-glitter watchfulness
Aware
Of eyes
Lasering
The air.

By Betty McKellar

Responses to Redwings Note

Seven observers responded to my note on communal display-singing of Redwings in spring (*SBN* March 2004). Generally the reaction was that this behaviour is widespread and regular in birds preparing for departure to their Northern breeding grounds in April.

John Hopkins was, like me, surprised at the lack of documentation of what he had observed on numerous occasions over 20 years in Exeter, where Redwings were only numerous at migration times. Groups of 50 or so singing " could make quite a noise" and provided a delightful chorus from mid-March to early April. In Devon these flocks were presumed to be "grounded migrants" but when he moved to Norfolk where the Redwings he saw were closer to their departure point over the North Sea, "they seem to be more intent on feeding in fields and building up their body weight than singing in trees." So his records there of the display were very few.

David Jenkins was astonished that I had thought noteworthy behaviour he had known for more than 60 years and which was documented by Bannerman and Witherby. He regards it as a regular daily late winter and early spring pre-roost activity, varying in strength according to the numbers of birds but "sometimes very sweet, prolonged and penetrating" with hundreds of birds involved. (I was intrigued, from fond memories of David, to note that this view could be that of an observer who preferred dusk bird-watching to early morning excursions !)

Andrew Stevenson from the Outer Hebrides also recorded the display as a regular feature of roosts "in small areas of natural willow scrub or the few, mainly coniferous, plantations with numbers from 20-30 birds up to several hundreds". In Uist the spring migrant redwings are Icelandic (coburni) occurring mostly in the first three weeks of April and migrant flocks will sing in early evening prior to going to roost and "even chattering on after dusk". Larger roosts can be particularly loud on still mornings.

My comparison of the song as "like water running over stones" was considered "very apt" by **Jeremy Powne** who wrote that he felt lucky to have come across a flock singing in chorus in Dorset where he only sees Redwings occasionally in late spring.

Graham Cittenden regards the subsong as a familiar sound which he has heard every year for 28 years on the North coast of Caithness and Sutherland. It is generally delivered from trees night and morning from the first to third weeks of April, rarely more than 30-40 birds together.

On the Ross estate in Hamilton **Jimmy Maxwell** gives many recorded observations of from 20 - 70 Redwings between early March and mid-April from 1984 -1996, twittering high in trees, sometimes with Fieldfares. It's a spectacle he looks forward to every year.

Harry Dott recorded the display regularly with a resident group (like the one I recorded in our local park in Linlithgow) of 70 - 100 Redwings in the Meadows, a large public park in Edinburgh. From late winter they sang from tall deciduous trees " a type of sub-song, rather starling-like in its communal effect, including chattering mixed with plaintive repeated phrases of notes recalling Mistle Thrush in quality. Small numbers of Starlings occasionally joined in. The singing was notably from 8.30 - 9.30 a.m. but sometimes in the afternoon too. He had observed a similar pattern with a flock of about 40 Redwings on a visit to Islay from 11-16 April 2004, from just after dawn (about 6.30 a.m.) continuing on in variable intensity till 9.30 a.m. There were Redwings all over Islay during this period but their numbers rapidly diminished (in the observed group from 40 down to 10) by 16th April, so that the display seemed to have presaged emigration to the North, as I had also observed in Linlithgow.

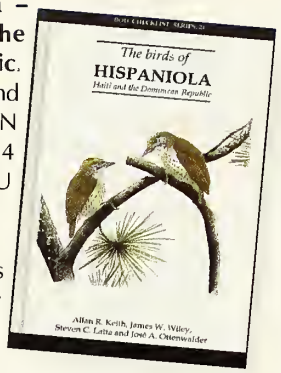
I am grateful to these readers for throwing further light on this phenomenon which we hope other SOC members will look out for and enjoy next spring as our wintering Redwings make use of communal singing to build the identity of their flock in preparation for their long journey North to the breeding grounds. First find your winter roost in late March and then get out at dawn in April to savour their excitement and their music.

Chris Mylne

Redwing
by John Busby

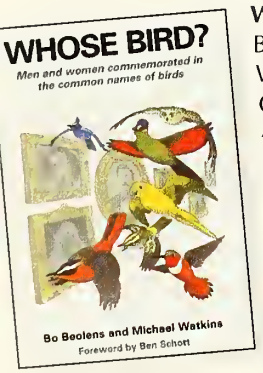
BOOK REVIEWS

Birds of Hispaniola – Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Keith, Wiley, Latta and Ottenwalder ISBN 0 9074 46 - 26 - 4 BOU/BOC £?. BOU Checklist Series 21


The birds of
HISPANIOLA
Haiti and the Dominican Republic
Allan R. Keith, James W. Wiley,
Steven C. Latta and Jose A. Ottenwalder

This BOU Checklist is in the customary format, with a lengthy introduction to the island, species accounts of all birds found, maps, photographs of topography and some birds, and a bibliography. It would serve as a valuable companion for any birders on a trip to this more unusual destination.

John Davies


WHOSE BIRD?
Men and women commemorated in the common names of birds
Bo Beolens and Michael Watkins
Foreword by Ben Schott

Whose Bird? by Bo Beolens and Michael Watkins. 2003. Christopher Helm. 400pp. Pbk. ISBN 0-7136-6647-1. £17.99

The subtitle of this handy-sized volume describes the main content: Men and Women who have been commemorated in the common names of birds. In total, 2,246 birds and 1,124 people are mentioned on a world-wide basis. The A-Z potted biographies vary greatly in length with only one or two sentences for many and up to a page and a half for a few better known figures. A few small photographic portraits are included but the vast majority lack any image at all of the people concerned.

It appears to me to be an informative and useful reference book but does not really compare with the in-depth biographies of the three Richard and Barbara Mearns volumes dealing with a similar subject.

David Clugston

The Skylark by Paul F. Donald. T & AD Poyser 2004 Hardback ISBN 0-7136-6568-8. Price £35

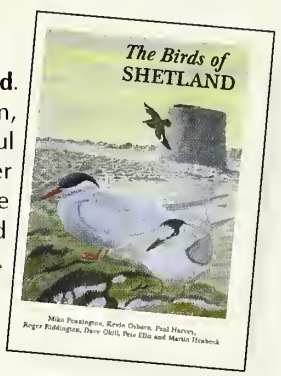
Principally because of its superb song, the Skylark is one of our best known birds, but for most people that's as far as it goes. No excuse now with this fascinating book which reveals all about the Skylark, and much more besides, with a wealth of interesting facts on Larks world-wide. For instance: the Horned Lark being one of the most abundant of all birds, the Raso Lark of the Cape Verde islands only numbering about 100 individuals and the Dune Lark of Namibia walking on sand at 67°C (but very quickly !)

The book covers all facets of the life of the Skylark in great depth and readable detail and is particularly appropriate at this time of concern for a species associated, at least in part, with modern agriculture. Enhancement is provided by an excellent selection of colour plates and drawings by Alan Harris.

A book of this type may not always be an easy read but I found it difficult to put down. A singing Skylark in the future will always remind the reader of the comprehensive coverage achieved in this book.

Keith Macgregor

The Birds of Shetland. Mike Pennington, Kevin Osborn, Paul Harvey, Roger Riddington, Dave Okill, Pete Ellis and Martin Heubeck. Christopher Helm. ISBN 0-7136-6038-4. £40.


The Birds of
SHETLAND
Mike Pennington, Kevin Osborn, Paul Harvey,
Roger Riddington, Dave Okill, Pete Ellis and Martin Heubeck

The Shetland Isles have become one of the most famous ornithological regions in Scotland, and indeed the whole of the UK. Not only are the sea-bird breeding colonies of international importance, but since the discovery of Fair Isle, awareness of the potential for studying bird migration, and especially rare birds in this archipelago, has arisen. Although the sea-birds on Shetland and bird migration on Fair Isle have been studied for many years, it is only since the 1960s that a number of bird-watchers have intensively studied the avifauna of the whole region. This has resulted in a level of area coverage unmatched anywhere else in Scotland.

This timely book brings together a wealth of knowledge into one carefully edited and organised volume. Such a huge amount of work has required a number of authors, but the whole book has been meticulously edited so that differences in contributors' entries are not apparent. For each species there is a textual description, with useful yearly and monthly incidence graphs. What is striking is the attention to detail, with all records checked and correctly sourced. In the case of breeding birds, this means a complete picture of the species' breeding biology, whereas for migrants a careful scrutiny and compilation of all previous records has been undertaken. These taken together result in an entirely authorative account of the birds of Shetland.

As well as the systematic list of species descriptions, the authors have written a number of introductory chapters on the geography and avifauna of Shetland, and a fascinating history of the human aspect to ornithology on the islands. There are also a number of useful appendices containing other interesting information.

All in all, it is clear that the authors have taken great care in the preparation of this book, and they should be congratulated for what they have produced. Though they state in the introduction that a second edition is already in preparation (!), I am sure this volume will remain the source reference for these islands for many years to come.

Finally, it is worth stating that the quality of the book should in itself be enough to entice those interested in the birds of Shetland to buy a copy, but the fact that the royalties will go to Shetland bird conservation is an added incentive.

Christopher McInerny

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RECENT REPORTS

A Review of summer 2004

Early June can often be a very productive time in spring for rarities in Scotland and a reasonable scatter was again evident. Potentially the bird of the month was the male **Red-headed Bunting** at Monreith (Dumfries and Galloway) on 8th–9th with its date and location perfect for a rarity of its type, i.e. a west coast location in late spring for a Central Asian species (see also Black-headed Bunting and Rose-coloured Starling and of course last year's Black Lark in Wales). Its appearance coincided with the release of a **Scops Owl** in Aberdeenshire. The bird had been flown ashore and taken into care after having

Scops Owl, Aberdeenshire *(Tim Marshall)*

been picked up on the *Forties 'D'* oil rig in the North Sea on the 2nd. After regaining weight, the bird, probably a male was released at the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve on the evening of the 9th in front of an assembled crowd invoking memories of a similar release in Renfrewshire in 1998. Like that Renfrewshire bird, this one also disappeared into the night never to be seen again. In the first week of June, the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve also played host to a **Purple Heron** on the 3rd and a **Spoonbill** (from May) still there on 1st whilst a **Common Crane** over-summered there (with another near Wick (Caithness) up to the 22nd June at least). Another Spoonbill was at Ardmore Point (Dunbartonshire) on 8th June, a **Great White Egret** reported on the Ythan Estuary (Aberdeenshire) on 1st June and an unringed **White Stork**, first seen in May, remained near Ruthwell (Dumfries and Galloway) until 13th June. It was quite a good summer for **Little Egret** with up to seven seen in June including one at Montrose Basin (Angus) which remained until 29th Aug at least and a further three birds were seen elsewhere in July/Aug.

Back to those early June rarities and up to the Northern Isles where Foula proved itself the place to be. Highlights there included an adult **Franklin's Gull** on the 10th (the fifth for Shetland and ninth for Scotland), an unusual but not unprecedented spring **Paddyfield Warbler** on the 13th, two different **Rustic Buntings** on the 8th and 13th (with elsewhere a male on Fair Isle on 4th–5th), a female **Subalpine Warbler** on the 12th and single **Short-toed Larks** on the 2nd and 10th. July brought no respite there either with a **White-throated Sparrow** seen on the 1st. The second **Collared Flycatcher** of the spring on Shetland was found on Unst, at Muness on 2nd June – (an adult male) whilst the female **Sardinian Warbler** first seen in May on Whalsay at Skaw remained until at least the 7th June and a **Greenish Warbler** was on Mousa on the 10th – a precursor to a remarkable Aug influx, more of which later. A 2nd-summer **White-winged Black Tern** was at Loch of Spiggie and Loch of Hillwell, south Mainland Shetland on 19th–21st June whilst another summer plumaged bird was at Loch nam Feithean, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 23rd June and in Aug a moulting ad was seen at Skinflats Lagoons (Upper Forth) on 12th–14th Aug. A surprise on the Outer Hebrides came in the form of a ***hornemanni* Arctic Redpoll** on Barra at Eoligarry on 7th June, whilst amongst more traditional June scarcities a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was on Fair Isle on 7th with a **Nightjar** seen there on 10th The **Nightingale** from May was still there on 2nd and an adult **Rose-coloured Starling** also from May, still present up to the 10th (with a 1st-summer seen there on 30th July, remarkably, after recent showings, the only other one reported from Scotland this summer). Two of the four **Bluethroats** seen in June were also on Fair Isle between the 1st–8th with the others on Whalsay on 1st and Out Skerries on 2nd (both Shetland). A **Woodchat Shrike** was on Papa Westray (Orkney) on 5th–7th June with also on Orkney a late **Shore Lark** at Marwick Head on 9th. The five scarce species that showed up best in June were Common Rosefinch, Marsh & Icterine Warblers, Golden Oriole and Red-backed Shrike with Shetland dominant in every case. Between the 2nd–19th seven **Golden Orioles** were seen, with one on North Ronaldsay on 2nd (the only one away from Shetland) and similarly the only

Common Rosefinch, Caithness *(Mark Oksien)*

Icterine Warbler away from Shetland from a total of 19 also on North Ronaldsay on 2nd–3rd. Fifteen **Common Rosefinches** were seen; four on Fair Isle, seven elsewhere on Shetland, three on Orkney and a male at Berriedale (Caithness) on at least 20th–28th. Up to 30 **Marsh Warblers** were seen with one on North Ronaldsay on 29th the only one away from Shetland where at least 10 different were seen on Fair Isle including five on the 1st. 80+ **Red-backed Shrikes** were seen in June, all on Shetland and Orkney, apart from a male at Rattray Head (Aberdeenshire) on 1st. 32 different were present on Shetland on the 2nd alone with counts including 12 on Unst on 6th, 10 on Fair Isle on 2nd with eight there on 1st and 8th, five on Fetlar on 2nd and four on Foula on 11th. In July a male Red-backed Shrike was reported at Carnock (Fife) on 10th whilst a male **Waxwing** at Maywick on 7th–9th was unsurprisingly the first record for Shetland in July.

The **Black Kite** returned for its third consecutive summer near Achentoul, Sutherland (Highland). Apparently first seen in May, it remained until the first weekend in July at least. Five migrant **Hobbies** were reported in June with five also seen in July and three in Aug whilst single migrant **Honey Buzzards** were seen on North Uist (Outer Hebrides) and Fair Isle in the last week of June, at Lossiemouth (Moray) on 25th July and on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) and Ythan Estuary (Aberdeenshire) both on 8th Aug. Noteworthy midsummer wildfowl records included a drake **Lesser Scaup** at Gart GPs on 19th–20th June – first record for the Upper Forth, a drake **King Eider** in Ayrshire up to 19th June at least when it was seen at Ballantrae, a drake **Smew** at Balnakeil (Highland) on 22nd June, 2 or 3 drake **Surf Scoters** in Aberdeenshire and Angus during the period, and two summering drake **Ring-necked Ducks** on the Outer

Hebrides. Some intriguing **Ruddy Shelduck** reports started with a female at Montrose Basin (Angus) on 3rd–19th July with then possibly the same bird at Loch of Skene (Aberdeenshire) from 9th Aug and two birds were seen at the Ythan Estuary, then RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, then Kingston (Aberdeenshire/Moray) - all on the 6th July.

After the record-breaking spring showing, up to four 1st-summer **Ring-billed Gulls** were still present on the Outer Hebrides in June and July whilst two unseasonal **Sabine's Gulls** were seen there in June: off Berneray on 2nd and on Lewis on 19th. 21 **Black Terns** were seen in Aug up to the 23rd, all reported from the Firth of Forth with then 50+ seen off Kinghorn Harbour (Fife) on 24th. It was a quiet summer for sea-watching although 10 **Long-tailed Skuas** passed Aird an Runair, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 3rd June with then 11 reported between 1st–24th Aug including four adults off Hound Point (Lothian) on 7th. A **Great Shearwater** passed Kinnaird Head (Aberdeenshire) on 10th Aug and single **Cory's Shearwaters** were reported past Anstruther (Fife) on 18th June and Eyemouth (Borders) on 13th July. Only two **Balearic Shearwaters** had been reported up to 24th Aug, both in July from Ayrshire and Angus - a low key showing also by **Sooty Shearwater** with only around 50 reported from 7th July whilst a **Wilson's Petrel** was seen in The Minch from the Ullapool-Stornoway ferry on 21st July. This remains a very rare bird indeed in Scottish waters; this would be the fifth Scottish record if accepted.

It was a good period for waders, with Aberlady Bay (Lothian) hinting at a return to its glory days with an adult summer ***mongolus*** **Lesser Sand Plover** (Mongolian Plover) on 8th–9th July. Discovered on the morning of the 8th by Janey McEwan, she knew it was a Sand Plover sp., it was not until that evening that its true identity was established. With it departing the next morning before 7am you had to be quick off the mark to connect, though the fact that Britain's 'top lister', Ron Johns was amongst those there at dawn on the 9th reminded us that Mongolian Plover is in fact a potential 'split' from the *altifrons* Lesser Sand Plover group. If so, this would be the third British record after one in Hampshire last year and one in Aberdeenshire in Aug 1991 which looks likely to be accepted as a Mongolian Plover by BBRC after a review. Also in July, an ad **Broad-billed Sandpiper** was on the Ythan Estuary (Aberdeenshire) on 29th whilst two **Stone Curlews** were seen this summer: at Musselburgh Lagoons on 26th June and between Newbie and Powfoot on 1st–2nd July – the second for Lothian and first for Dumfries & Galloway respectively. An ad **Pacific Golden Plover** was on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 30th June, an ad **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** on Tiree (Argyll) on 17th–19th June and it was a fantastic period for **Pectoral Sandpiper** with 10 seen in June, including five on the Outer Hebrides, six seen in July and another three in August. Amongst scarcer species there was a very good showing by **Curlew Sandpiper** with 26

Ring-billed Gull, Lewis *(Martin Scott)*

Storm Petrel ringing in Aberdeenshire; one of an increasing number of Petrel ringing sites across Scotland and N-E England *(Harry Scott)*

(mongolus) Lesser Sand Plover, Aberlady Bay

Curlew Sandpiper, Lewis *(Martin Scott)*

adults seen in June /July and the first juveniles appearing in Aug from the 23rd with around 15 juv **Little Stints** also seen in Aug from 21st. It has been a very good autumn for **Green Sandpiper** also, epitomised by the record showing on Islay and Tiree (Argyll) with a record 5+ seen on the former and up to 10 on the latter during Aug. 30+ **Wood Sandpipers** were reported in Aug with the easterly winds and rain producing some fantastic east coast falls around the 10th–13th Aug and then on 23rd–24th.

This resulted in a record breaking showing by **Greenish Warbler** with 17 seen between 10th–24th; eight in Aberdeenshire, three in Angus, three in Fife, one in Borders, one on Orkney and one on Shetland. There were four different **Aquatic Warblers** on Shetland between 12th–16th, two on Fair Isle and singles at Quendale and Pool of Virkie, whilst in Aberdeenshire a **Great Snipe** was seen at Girdle Ness on 11th (the first in Aberdeenshire since 1934) and a **Thrush Nightingale** was at Cruden Bay on 12th – only the second Aberdeenshire record after one in 1981. A **Lesser Grey Shrike** was at Gulberwick (Shetland) on 17th with one on South Ronaldsay on 21st–23rd (the first on Orkney since 1967). A **Subalpine Warbler** was at Quendale on 11th Aug with a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** at Sandgarth on 13th (both Shetland) and a **Hoopoe** at Rattray Head (Aberdeenshire) on 13th. During this rarity barrage, 30+ **Red-backed Shrikes** were seen, 25+ **Icterine Warblers** were reported from 9th Aug, and 30+ **Wrynecks** also from 9th including on Fair Isle the earliest ever there on the 10th and five seen there on 24th. 35 **Barred Warblers** were seen from 6th Aug including one in a garden at Barrhead on 22nd–24th – (the first record for Renfrewshire). Also in Aug., single **Spotted Crakes** were on Fair Isle on 16th and at Baron's Haugh RSPB (Lanarkshire) on 18th–21st.

Angus Murray

Little Bittern, St. Kilda, 28th May *(Susan Bain)*

A pair of Icelandic Whooper Swans successfully raised their family on Lewis this summer *(Martin Scott)*

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Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club,
Harbour Point, Newhailes Road,
Musselburgh, East Lothian EH21 6SJ
Tel: 0131 653 0653
Fax: 0131 653 0654
E-mail: mail@the-soc.org.uk

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland.

www.the-soc.org.uk

Passwords to access members' web pages: 'blue' & 'tit'